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***Koinonia* in Bilateral and Multilateral Dialogues:
Historical and Theological Perspectives**

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Thesis presented as part of the requirements for the degree of *Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies*

Mémoire présenté en accomplissement partiel des exigences pour l'obtention d'une *Maîtrise universitaire d'études avancées en études œcuméniques*

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June 2015

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Acknowledgement

I place on record, my sincere thanks to all those whom have helped me in this project. I am grateful to Prof Dr Christophe Chalamet and to Prof Rev. Dr. Odair Pedroso Mateus for the guidance they offered to my work. This thesis would have come to no results without their helpful insights and critiques. I am also thankful to Prof Rev Fr Dr Ioan Sauca, Director of the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Prof Rev Dr Dagmar Heller, Dean of the Ecumenical Institute, and to Prof Rev Dr John Gibaut. Through all their suggestions, they guided me to a deeper historical and theological sense of the ecumenical bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

Introduction

Ecclesial unity has always been a Christian focus, but the form in which this attention was expressed varied greatly. There is an impression that ecclesiology is a modern theological field not previously explored. The reality is, however, a bit more nuanced. It is true that in the first centuries Church unity, being lived by all Christians, did not required an extensive doctrinal definition. It was enough to declare that there is *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic* Church. Why should one ponder upon a thing that came naturally to all? Yet, it is also apparent that, from its beginnings, Christianity worked to maintain its ecclesial cohesion. From the Apostolic age on, schismatic teachings had to be confronted by the communities and by the whole Church. In other words, throughout Church history, unity required testimony and dialogue, self-denial and martyrdom. It may be said that, because of the context in which the churches find themselves nowadays, the ecclesiological discourse moved from the acknowledgement of what prevents unity, to the recognition of what can bring it.

In today's ecumenical context, the attempt to describe the unity of the Church in a way that would suit both the local identity and the universal cohesion, brought bilateral and multilateral dialogues to a communion ecclesiology.¹ However, the connotations of the concept have become, at a certain level, ambiguous. It is difficult to see what exactly does communion ecclesiology and *koinonia* imply for all ecumenical partners. In this respect, coming closer to an answer pushes one to ask:

How has 'koinonia' and its related concept of 'communion' been developed to date in ecumenical dialogues, and where might they be strengthened in understanding?

¹ In the present dissertation "communion-ecclesiology" and "koinonia-ecclesiology" are consider synonymous. Theologians have hinted that the usage of the two notions should be nuances. This, however, lies outside the scope of the following study. For a presentation of the problem cf. Mark Edward CHAPMAN, *Unity as Koinonia: the Ecclesiology of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1993 (dissertation)*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: 1996), p. 1-6.

Many of the recent ecumenical agreements and convergence documents define unity by appealing to the biblical notion of *koinonia*. The ecumenical success of this ecclesiological approach is due to the notion itself.

Koinonia has a frequent occurrence in the New Testament – it appears over sixty four times,² and has a high semantic flexibility.³ Analysing the scriptural corpus, the vast majority of scholars have highlighted particularly the relational side of the concept.⁴ Thus, communion has the meaning of: a. partaking in a thing (I Timothy 5: 22; Mathew 23: 30-31; I Corinthians 1: 9; II Peter 1: 4; Ephesians 3: 6; 2: 19), b. partaking in the life, sufferings and ministry of Christ (II Corinthians 1: 7; I Peter 5: 1; Galatians 2: 9), c. partaking in the mission of the Church (Romans 12: 13; 15: 26; II Corinthians 8: 23; Philippians 4: 14-15; Hebrew 10: 23, 33; 13: 16; Galatians 6: 6), d. following a moral code that differentiates one from the world (II John 2; Revelation 18: 4), e. being gifted by the Spirit (Acts 2: 42; 4: 42), respectively f. staying in unity and continuity with the Apostolic teachings and life (Acts 2: 42). All of the connotations mentioned by scholars hint (1) an activity and (2) a transformation imposed by it. The text from I Corinthians 10: 16-17 adds to the ecclesiological relevance of the term. The passage speaks about a communion that is beyond a covenant or a participation; it talks about an incorporation in Christ.

If the scriptural association between *ekklesia* and *koinonia* can be contested by scholars,⁵ the ecclesiological relevance of the notion is recommended, secondly, by its patristic incidence.⁶ Significant theologians, including Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard and John

² John REUMAN, “Koinonia in Scripture: A Survey of Biblical Texts”, in Thomas F. BEST, Ghunter GASSMANN (ed.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), 38-69.

³ For a comparison between the meaning of communion in the Holy Scriptures and in the Greco-Roman world cf. John Y. CAMPBELL, “Koinonia and its cognates in the New Testament”, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1932, vol. 51, no. 4, p. 352-380. For a more systematic perspective cf. M. Jack SUGGS, “Koinonia in the New Testament”, in *Mid-Stream. An Ecumenical Journal*, 1984, vol. 23, no. 4 (October), p. 351-362. Cf. also Betty Jane LILLIE, “Koinonia in the New Testament: Integral Dynamic of the Christian Life”, in *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*, 2008, vol. 28, p. 55-66.

⁴ Cf. Jeffrey KLOHA, “Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament”, in *Concordia Journal*, 2012, vol. 38, no. 1, p. 23-32. And Thomas A. RAND, “A Call to Koinonia: A Rhetorical Analysis of Galatians 5:25-6:10”, in *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*, 1995, vol. 15, p. 79-92.

⁵ Cf. in comparison J. KLOHA, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31 and Philip KARIATLIS, “Affirming Koinonia ecclesiology: An Orthodox Perspective”, in *Phronema*, 2012, vol. 38, no. 1, p. 23-32.

⁶ Cf. Nicholas LOSSKY, José Míguez BONINO, John POBEE, Tom F. STRANSKY, Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT, Pauline WEBB (ed.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, second edition (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), p. 646-652.

D. Zizioulas, have proved this extensively in their works.⁷ Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, to give only one example, describes the Church as a communion with Christ, in the Spirit.⁸

The present study gives an outline on how bilateral and multilateral dialogues have used the notion of *koinonia* in relation to ecclesiology with a view to full visible Eucharistic fellowship. It is not so much an inquiry on the relation between modern communion ecclesiology, on the one hand, and scriptural and patristic visions of ecclesial unity, on the other. However, this comparison remains an important factor in the development of the present dissertation. The main purpose of this thesis is to see which were the starting points and the conclusions of the bilateral and multilateral dialogues in relation to *koinonia* and how close have churches come in the process of building consensus around the notion.

In order to facilitate the reading, the paper is divided into three chapters. The first two give historical and theological perspectives on the bilateral, and the multilateral dialogues; while the last chapter attempts to analyse two of the communion's ecumenical transversal dimensions.

⁷ Cf. Jean-Marie-Roger TILLARD, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001). John D. ZIZIOULAS, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).

⁸ Cf. Eric OSBORN, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 123-126.

Chapter I:

Koinonia in Ecumenical Bilateral Dialogues

There is a tendency among Christian confessions to describe themselves as “communion”.⁹ The importance of this transformation can be related to the frequency in which the notion occurs in bilateral dialogues. In recent years, regardless of the purpose of the theological debate or of the agreements the commissions came to, the concept of *koinonia* was implied. But, exactly because the term has been so widely used, it has also gained in ambiguity. It has become difficult to separate what is transitional and what is transversal, what is contextual and what can play a role in the wider ecclesiological debate. Moreover, the span of meanings generated by constant reinterpretations is not balanced by an equal acceptance of these connotations in Orthodox and Reformation theologies, for example. If the Church can be depicted as a communion, the term must show dogmatic precision. This calls for a reverse process, as one must start from the usage of *koinonia* in bilateral conversations in order to find out what it may mean for the ecclesiological self-understanding of the communions in dialogue.

For methodological reasons this chapter analyses only three bilateral dialogues that have focused on communion ecclesiology: the Lutheran-Catholic, the Anglican-Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox-Catholic dialogues. The grounds for such a choice are both

⁹ From where a vast majority of churches previously focused on defining themselves in terms of local separated congregations, today there is a tendency to understand the church in terms of a wider, universal, perspective. A good example is the Lutheran World Federation. Since its foundation in 1947, the necessity of clarifying the relation between local communities became stringent. Slowly, in the Lutheran ecclesiological debate an antithesis between the local and universal dimensions of the Church came at surface (1963 – Helsinki, 1973 – Dar-es-Salaam, 1977 – Evian). Finally, at the 1990 Curitiba assembly, the Lutheran Federation defined itself as a “communion of churches”, highlighting the universal dimension of the Church – Cf. Kjell NORDSTOKKE, “The ecclesiological self-understanding of the Lutheran Federation: from association to communion of Churches”, in *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 44 (1992), no. 4, Geneva, p. 478-490. See also Viggo MORTENSEN (cord.), Jens Holger SCHJØRRING, Prasanna KUMARI and Norman A. HJELM (ed.), *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 216-245. It is, however, important to mention that the Lutheran ecclesiology does not require an *organic unity*, but a *reconciled diversity*.

historical and theological. From a historical standpoint, these were the first official bilateral discussions to use the notion in recent times and because of them *koinonia* came to be taken up by other contemporary dialogues. The use of the concept was not directed towards convincing *the other*, but played a role in the life of each partner in dialogue. From a theological perspective, the three dialogues give an overview of what communion is and may become in the future.

1. The Lutheran – Roman-Catholic dialogue

At the international level, the first connection between *koinonia* and Church unity was made by the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue.¹⁰ This dialogue, initiated in 1967, has gone through four phases so far¹¹ and has produced a series of documents with a significant impact upon ecumenical theology. At first, communion played a secondary role and was used in describing the Eucharistic gathering of the community. The 1972 *Malta Report* briefly affirmed that the Eucharistic fellowship is a sign of ecclesial unity.¹² Using this subtle construction, the commission seemed to give little value to *koinonia*, since they distinguished it from Church unity in itself. In other words, the text gives the sense that the Eucharist is related to Church's cohesion, without determining it.

Things took a shift in 1978, when the second document was released. Christology remained central in defining communion, yet a Trinitarian orientation and a practical relevance were considered as well. Thus, the 1978 agreement starts by affirming Christ's

¹⁰ Yve Congar considers *koinonia* to be an intrinsic notion in the bilateral conversations between the Orthodox and the Old Catholics from the 19th century. Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Diversity and Communion*, (London: SCM Press, 2012), p. 49-52. However, the emergence of the concept, as we know it today, depends of the Malta Report from 1972.

¹¹ The first phase of the dialogue, between 1967 and 1972, was highlighted by the Malta Report from 1972: *The Gospel and the Church*. The second stage of the conversation, from 1973 to 1984, came to a wide consensus on more than one problem through: 1978 – *The Eucharist*, 1980 – *All Under One Christ*, 1980 – *Ways to Community*, 1981 – *The Ministry in the Church*, 1983 – *Martin Luther – Witness to Christ* and 1984 – *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*. The third period of the dialogue, 1986-1993, furthers the ecclesiological debates on the *Church and Justification* – 1993, while the fourth stage, 1995-2006, after affirming the existence of a differentiated consensus between the two traditions (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* -1999), considered the relation between apostolicity and the Church (*The Apostolicity of the Church* – 2006). From 2011 onwards, the conversation is focused on the understanding and recognition of baptism.

¹² *Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on "The Gospel and the Church" (Malta Report)*, § 68-72 – in Harding MEYER, Lukas VISCHER (ed.), *Growth in Agreement I. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1972-1982*, second edition, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007), p. 184-185.

redemptive sacrifice, through which humanity is brought into the intimacy of God.¹³ Jesus's kenotic act is continued in the service of the Church, where, by receiving the Eucharist, the faithful lives a closeness to Christ that is "akin to the communion of the Son with the Father."¹⁴ The parallel between the kinship humans have with Christ and the Son has with the Father, shows a great progress in *koinonia* ecclesiology, because it recognizes Jesus as the Way towards human transformation and Church's communion. Seen from a different angle, the text works a transition from God's *oikonomia* – Christ gives Himself for the life of the world; to God's *theologia*. This movement from *oikonomia* to *theologia* is interesting,¹⁵ especially because it is doubled by a transition from the personal level of encountering Jesus, to a communitarian one.¹⁶ If in 1972 ecclesial unity was indicated by chalice fellowship, in 1978 it refers to *perichoresis* and is set up as a communion.¹⁷

1980 marked a third enlargement of *koinonia* theology in the Catholic-Lutheran discussions. *Ways to community* used the concept to describe the ecclesial realities of the two traditions. The text portrayed Church's cohesion as a result of shared responsibility¹⁸ and, consequently, the dynamic aspect of communion was stressed. In other words, the gift of *koinonia* could grow in evidence due to human efforts.¹⁹ It was on this double foundation, the unity already given in the Spirit and the work to multiply it that a precision *ad extra* was gained. Thus, the document states that Church communion is characterized by joint service in preaching the word, in celebration and in diaconal activities.²⁰ This observation connected the Church's visibility in mission to its inner unity. Not without sense, the same report speaks about degrees of communion and levels of unity,²¹ as a statement to the world of the Church's essence.

¹³ *Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission*, 1978, § 6 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 19, p. 197.

¹⁵ It is interesting to see in comparison the text of this dialogue with the Pentecostal-Catholic dialogue from 1989: *Perspectives on Koinonia*. The same connections seem to be put forward.

¹⁶ *Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission...*, § 26-28, p. 198.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, § 72-73, p. 210.

¹⁸ *Ways to community*, 1980, § 56-58 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, § 76, p. 231.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, § 61-72, p. 227-230.

²¹ *Ibid.*, § 54, p. 225: "In such an open growing together we can and should set our eyes on *intermediate goals* and keep on re-examining the methods of advance. By moving in this way from an incomplete to a more and more complete communion, we shall be able to take account of a wide variety of different historical, theological and regional situations." For the Orthodox standpoint the idea of deficient communion will remain ambiguous and problematic.

The 1984 agreement: *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, made a decisive step towards adopting *koinonia* ecclesiology. Especially two things are noticeable. On the one hand, the Lutheran theologians reassessed the mystery of the Church in light of unity in faith, Eucharistic fellowship and episcopate.²² Here, the effort to overcome the Church-Gospel antithesis was evident and communion was presented as a harmony between the word and the institutional aspects of the Church. Unfortunately, the language of the text introduced the idea that the Church is an instrument²³ and this potentially diminished the reception of the dialogue in the ecumenical landscape. On the other hand, the Catholic theologians rethought the significance of local structures, declaring that in its nature the Church is a *koinonia* of local communities,²⁴ which live their indivisibility in conciliarity.²⁵ The impact this document had must be correlated with the bishops' synod from the following year (1985), which declared that communion ecclesiology was inspired by Vatican II. However, due to its ambiguities and since it tried to move from “an overall agreement to an agreement on the whole”,²⁶ the 1984 document was not often considered by other traditions.

Koinonia played again a key role in the document *Church and Justification* signed by Catholics and Lutherans in 1993. Besides synthesizing prior reflections on communion, the report developed new insights. For instance, it puts forward the idea that the unity of the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, and that the Holy Spirit creates both types of communion.²⁷ The joint Catholic-Lutheran Commission had not insisted on how the Holy Spirit sustains the ecclesial *koinonia*, but it recognized its veracity in the preaching

²² *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, 1984, § 49 – in Jeffrey GROS, Harding MEYER, William G. RUSCH (ed.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1982-1998*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2000), p. 453-454.

²³ *Ibid.*, § 85, p. 464. Cf. André BIRMELÉ, *La communion ecclésiale. Progrès œcuméniques et enjeux méthodologiques*, (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 2000), p. 21-22. Making the Church an instrument meant creating a new antithesis between the Church – as Body of Christ and the Church – as servant of the Word.

²⁴ *Facing Unity...*, § 5-6, p. 445. The text highlights: “6. This view of church unity as communion (communion) goes back to the early days of Christianity. It is determinative for the early church as well as for the life and ecclesiology of the Orthodox churches. In recent times it has been particularly stressed in Catholic ecclesiology.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, § 124, p. 471.

²⁶ A. BIRMELÉ, *op. cit.*, p. 19: “Le dialogue devait essayer de passer d'un ensemble de consensus à un consensus d'ensemble.”

²⁷ Cf. in comparison *Church and Justification*, 1993, § 41, 49, 61, 63 and 116 – in J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH (ed.), *Growth in Agreement II...*, p. 497, 499, 502 and 512.

act, in baptism and in the Eucharist.²⁸ Therefore, a particular tension between the already present communion and its final fulfilment in the Spirit became obvious. The gift of faith empowers the entire community and each person to a hopeful expectation of the *eschaton*. *Koinonia* was understood, here, as ‘part of the already’, and ‘not yet’ dialectic.²⁹ In the same document, communion takes place in the world in concrete contexts³⁰ and at different levels.³¹

During the Catholic-Lutheran conversation period, the meaning of *koinonia* was constantly enriched. If in the beginnings the notion hinted at a horizontal unity proven by Eucharistic fellowship, eventually it came to denote a vertical unity as well. Not only that in Christ the community lives its unity, but in Him it shares in the life of the Trinity.³² In the same time, *koinonia* received after 1980 a pneumatological nuance, forasmuch as the Holy Spirit is called agent and forwarder of it. By assuming these principles of thought, the documents subsequent to 1980 highlighted the practical and visible dimensions of *koinonia*.

2. The Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue

The Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue is the second bilateral conversation that addressed prominently communion ecclesiology.³³ The *Final Report* of ARCIC I stated that, in drafting all documents from 1967-1981, it became clear that the notion of *koinonia*

²⁸ *Ibid*, § 66, p. 503.

²⁹ Cf. in comparison *Church and Justification*, 1993, § 42 and 292, p. 497 and 553.

³⁰ *Ibid*, § 79, p. 506.

³¹ The effort of the Roman Catholic theologians to identify different ways of ministerial communion, which would facilitated the dialogue with the Reformation Churches, is noticeable. The document states that through the bishop a communion between communities is realised, while the priests live in a collegial communion. Cf. *Church and Justification*, 1993, § 92-93, p. 508-509. The 2006 text that deals with the apostolicity in the Church will use the same theological pattern.

³² *Ibid*, § 63, p. 502.

³³ The dialogue was initiated in 1967 and has gone through three phases so far. The first ARCIC I (Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission), produced the following documents: 1971 – *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 1979 – *Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation*, 1973 – *Ministry and Ordination*, 1979 – *Ministry and Ordination: elucidation*, 1976 – *Authority in the Church I*, 1981 – *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, 1981 – *Authority in the Church II*, and ended with a *Final Report* in 1981. The second stage, ARCIC II, begun in 1982 and created: 1986 – *Salvation and the Church*, 1990 – *Church as Communion*, 1993 – *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, 1998 – *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* and 2004 – *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. The third phase of conversation started from 2012. Alongside these documents, a second commission IARCUM (International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission) has worked on implementing the ARCIC agreements and produced a series of reports.

was indispensable.³⁴ However, the term did not appear in the 1971 document: *Eucharistic Doctrine*,³⁵ and was employed only from the 1973 agreement, when it was linked with ministry and Eucharist.³⁶ From 1976 until 1981, communion was frequently brought into discussion to stress the role of authority in reaching unity.³⁷ Given the similarities between the two traditions, the joint commission emphasized the relation between the bishop, jurisdiction and *koinonia*; searching to balance the importance of local communities, evident in Church's conciliarity, with that of universality, which is supported by primacy. *Authority in the Church II* affirmed that the papal primacy is a sign and instrument of communion,³⁸ while the preceding documents spoke about the Church as being God's sign and instrument. The connection between the Church and primacy remain rather unclear, yet essential for *koinonia* ecclesiology.

It is with the 1990 document: *Church as Communion*, that communion theology comes to its fullness. Not only that the text framed a link between the four Nicene-Constantinopolitan marks of the Church and *koinonia*, but it showed clarity in defining the notion. Maybe because the commission was not interested in solving a particular division, *Church as Communion* draws into such an important convergence. Based on biblical images of the Church, communion had four characteristics in the 1990 agreement. (1) First, *koinonia* was transcendent. Paraphrasing the text's logic, because God initiates and sustains the Church's communion,³⁹ unity will always send to the Trinitarian mystery. This means that before creating communion, the Church receives it. It is in creation's solidarity⁴⁰ and in Christ's self-giving love that this gift of unity becomes easy to recognise.⁴¹ (2) The second specificity of *koinonia* hinted towards Church's responsibility. Thus, even though unity was given in Christ, it requires personal and communal labour to be made visible in

³⁴ *Final Report*, 1981 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 62-63.

³⁵ The document makes short references to Eucharist fellowship. Cf. *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 1971, § 3 and 10 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 69 and 71.

³⁶ Cf. *Ministry and Ordination*, 1973, § 3, 7, 10, 12 and 16 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 79, 81 and 82-83.

³⁷ Cf. in comparison *Authority in the Church I*, § 5-10, 21-24; *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, § 8; *Authority in the Church II*, § 11, 15, 17, 26-27 – in H. MEYER, L. VISCHER (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 91-93, 96-97; 103; 108-110 and 113.

³⁸ *Authority in the Church II*, 1981, § 11, p. 108-109.

³⁹ *Church as Communion*, 1990, § 6 and 22 – in J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH (ed.), *Growth in Agreement II...*, p. 330 and 334.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, § 12, p. 331.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, § 23, p. 334.

the world. The Church must respond to the sin of divisions⁴² by a humble search of reconciliation.⁴³ This second principle, of constituting communion by searching for it, has an original dimension. On the one hand, the uniqueness of every community affirms itself in pursuing communion, while, on the other hand, the power of communion reveals itself in the different communities.⁴⁴ (3) Though present in previous documents, the 1990 dialogue gives greater weight to the sacramental aspect of *koinonia*.⁴⁵ As in the precedent documents, *Church as Communion* invokes the nature of unity as connected with Baptism and Eucharist.⁴⁶ (4) According to the Dublin agreement, the fourth characteristic of *koinonia* is its relation with apostolic succession and apostolic faith.⁴⁷

Building on the 1990 report, in 1993 the dialogue was able to take a step forward and focused on the ethical aspect of communion. The report *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* is a unique ecumenical text to this day. If other agreements were preoccupied with describing the path towards full communion, this one was interested in how communities in communion have to act.⁴⁸ Church's *koinonia* was delineated here from an eschatological stance.

The concept of communion therefore strongly influenced the Anglican-Roman Catholic conversations. Unlike the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, ARCIC started from accepting authority as an expression of *koinonia* and, from there on, it tried to display the road towards ecclesial unity. Seen in comparison, the two bilateral conversations are like two sides of the same coin. They are indispensable for understanding what *koinonia* stands for in the West.⁴⁹ The interdependence between the Word, liturgy and *diakonia* or

⁴² The language sends to the ecumenical work (1948 – *Man's Disorder and God's design*) and to the ideas of *Faith and Order*. Cf., as an example, *Unity of the Church – Unity of Mankind*, 1973 – in Gunther GASSMANN, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, Faith and Order Paper No. 159, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), p. 137-143.

⁴³ Cf. in comparison *Church as Communion*, 1990, § 1-4 and 19-24, 43, p. 329-330 and 333-334, 338.

⁴⁴ Communion is shaped here as a process. It is comparable with the construction of personal identity. See the remarks made by Paul AVIS, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology. The Church Made Whole?*, (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), p. 144-148.

⁴⁵ On this aspect cf. Lorelei F. FUCHS, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality*, (Cambridge: Grand Rapids, 2008), p. 314.

⁴⁶ The document from 1990 depends, here, on *Salvation and the Church – 1986*.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Church as Communion*, 1990, § 33, p. 336.

⁴⁸ For an overview of the document cf. P. AVIS, *op. cit.*, p. 169-182.

⁴⁹ However, for a more comprehensive picture two other dialogues would be worth considering. The first one, Pentecostal-Catholic, started in 1972 and came to speak in 1989 about *Perspectives on Koinonia*. The text from 1989 presents communion as a participation of the faithful in the life of the Trinity (§ 29, 70) and

the relation of God's *oikonomia* and ministerial responsibility have remained themes that stir a lot of interest. Of course, many suggestions made by LARCIC must be considered in-depth and some questions remain without an answer.

3. The Eastern Orthodox – Roman-Catholic dialogue

While the Orthodox Church has used communion ecclesiology in abundance in bilateral dialogues,⁵⁰ the most original image of this notion is given by its conversation with the Roman-Catholic Church.⁵¹ The 1982 agreement: *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, catches in essence of all later developments on the theme. The text described *koinonia* using four marks.

Firstly, communion is pneumatological. The unity of the Church meant, for the joint commission, partaking in the life of the Holy Trinity⁵² by the personal gift of the Spirit.⁵³ Recalling a patristic doxology – *in the Spirit, through Christ, to the Father*,⁵⁴ the Trinitarian *oikonomia* was not constricted to encountering the Holy Spirit and pointed towards a mobility. Therefore, in its conclusion, the text supported *koinonia*'s primacy over the

highlights the role of the community (Catholics), respectively of the person (Pentecostals) in creating ecclesial unity (§ 33). It is important to note the difference between the way one comes to such a *koinonia*. The Pentecostal will say that faith alone is enough, while Catholics will stress the necessity of Baptism (§ 49-50) – in J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH (ed.), *Growth in Agreement II...*, p. 735-752. The second conversation, between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman-Catholics, was initiated in 1977. In 1992 a document called *The Church as a Communion in Christ* was agreed upon. Among other things, this text links communion to the new creation and to revelation in Christ (§ 21-24) – in J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 391.

⁵⁰ The conversation with the Anglicans is an example in this sense – see the agreements from Moscow (1973) and Dublin (1984). A second example is the dialogue with the Old Catholic – especially the text on unity in the Church from 1987. Cf. Viorel IONIȚĂ, “The Vision of Unity in the multilateral dialogues and bilateral dialogues of the Orthodox Churches and other churches”, in *Studii Teologice*, III series, 2008, București, no. 3, p. 7-59.

⁵¹ The conversation was initiated in 1980 and produced the following documents: 1980 – *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, 1987 – *Faith, Sacraments and Unity of the Church*, 1988 – *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church*, 1993 – *Uniatism: Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion* and 2007 – *Ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the Church. Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*.

⁵² Cf. *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, 1982, § I,1 – in J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH (ed.), *Growth in Agreement II...*, p. 652.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, § I,6, p. 653-654.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, § I,3-5, p. 654.

community.⁵⁵ Strictly speaking, each community joins the communion that precedes it and, for this reason, the Church is in an ever-lasting *epiclesis*.⁵⁶

Secondly, *koinonia* is a Eucharistic event. In the words of the document: “[...] the eternal life which God has given to the world in the event of Christ, his eternal Son, is contained in «earthen vessels». [...] the Eucharist exists as the sacrament of Christ himself.”⁵⁷ This overlapping between the sacrifice of the Cross and the liturgical sacrifice, makes a great deal for Church’s unity. Not only was the Eucharist juxtaposed with Christ’s death and resurrection, but it became, at the same time, the founding sacrifice of ecclesial *koinonia*. A paradoxical aspect of the Church’s unity is highlighted here. By the gift of His life, Christ creates the communion of the Church, but, because His sacrifice is not perceived as a past event, Christians attend the constitutive moment of their community.

The last two features of *koinonia* are the *kerygmatic* and *eschatological* aspects.⁵⁸ It is worth mentioning the proximity of these two dimensions. In a certain way, their interdependence gives a basis for catholicity, as the Church must unite the entire creation and must turn down any temptation for separation.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Church’s mission to spread the word of God and her eschatological foundation say something about the mysterious nature of the ecclesial communion. The Church, as the Body of Christ, reflects in the world God’s eternity, while God’s eternity intersects in the Church the time of the world.

Conclusion

Seen in comparison, the three dialogues prove how important communion ecclesiology became for bilateral encounters. The Church’s unity is described in similar ways by all of these texts. Most of them will affirm a Trinitarian model as a basis for *koinonia*, for example. Yet, something remains fundamentally divergent when these conversations are read thoroughly. It is not solely about what they stress in particular, but about what they imply when using *perichoresis*, Eucharist, mission and so forth. There is

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, § II,1, p. 654-655.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, § I,5c, p. 653.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, § I,1-2, p. 652.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, § II,2, p. 655.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, § III,2-4, p. 657-658.

a tendency to drop in the texts equivocal statements that bring two traditions closer, but yet create an obstacle elsewhere. How does the findings of the Lutheran-Catholic conversation affect the Orthodox-Catholic discussions, one may ask? When these and many more are taken into account, things tend to become complicated and *koinonia* splits into communions.

Chapter II:

***Koinonia* in Ecumenical Multilateral Dialogue**

After centuries in which the churches defined their mission in an antagonistic way, the twentieth century represented a period of dialogue and collaboration. Human solidarity, in facing unjust social systems and the spiritual crisis which many traditions were going through, gave to the communities from East and West an opportunity to reconsider their seclusion. The problem of ecclesial unity became one of the churches' major concerns and reconciliation became of stringent importance.

This move, from isolation to encounter, made multilateral conversations not only possible, but desirable. In a systematic way, the ecumenical multilateral dialogue was promoted by the Movement on Faith and Order, which became, after the establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, the Commission on Faith and Order. For the WCC and Faith and Order the unity of the Church was a design that required theological debate and convergence. Surely, the description of what Church unity means and of the methods to reach it reflects a progressive development. In the beginning, the ecumenical efforts were barely an attempt to compare ecclesiologies (Lausanne, 1927) that brought to the surface a number of models of unity (Edinburgh, 1937). Only from 1952 onwards, due to establishment of the World Council of Churches on a traditional Christological basis, was the unity of the Church perceived as a common calling of all Christians, then as a horizontal communion (Salamanca, 1973) and, in the end, as a life in communion with God (Santiago de Compostela, 1993).

Communion ecclesiology had a long way to go before its clear articulation in the Faith and Order multilateral dialogue. In the Ecumenical Movement, contrary to what may be held, the concept of *koinonia* was not suddenly adopted in the 1980s, but it accompanied the ecumenical process since at least 1920.⁶⁰ However, initially, communion had the force

⁶⁰ Cf. Mark Edward CHAPMAN, *Unity as Koinonia: the Ecclesiology of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1993 (dissertation)*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: 1996), p. 11-18.

of a confessional position and did not imply an ecumenical consensus. At the First World Conference on Faith and Order, for example, the Anglicans and the Orthodox did not use this notion in the same way, while representatives of the Reformation churches hardly mentioned it. For the vast majority of theologians gathered at Lausanne, *koinonia* was understood in analogy with the Pauline metaphor of the Church (Body of Christ) and seemed to portray an organic unity. They did not take into account the image of the vineyard (John XV, 1-7) and the reality of unity-in-diversity.⁶¹

The great discovery of 1980s was exactly the accommodation of these two apparent divergent dimensions under the new proposals for portraying the Church's indivisibility. It should be also noted that *koinonia* was implied in the WCC's official documents from the first Assembly in Amsterdam. Referring back to the *Message of the Ecumenical Patriarchate* from 1920,⁶² which called Christians to form a League (*koinonia*) of Churches (following the model of the League of Nations), the WCC *Constitution* of 1948 described the Council as a fellowship (or *koinonia*) of churches.⁶³ Communion had, therefore, an organizational dimension. The churches were invited to show more inter-institutional collaboration, to behave as a federation. It is beyond doubt that the dogmatic and spiritual unity of Christendom was sought by the founders of WCC, yet *koinonia* was not the ecclesiological leading pattern for describing these intentions. When *koinonia* would have obtained such an authority, its institutional profile would have become less strong in order to make room for the sacramental and relational dimensions.

Koinonia was used in a wide range of Faith and Order studies and conferences. This chapter limits itself to three important moments of the multilateral conversation: (1) the statement on unity adopted by the WCC Seventh Assembly held in Canberra in 1991; (2) the final report of the Fifth Faith and Order World Conference held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993; and finally (3) the convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* adopted by the Commission on Faith and Order in 2012 and received by the Tenth Assembly of the WCC, held in Busan in 2013. The selection was motivated by

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 26, 41, 46-47.

⁶² "A New Translation of the 1920 Message of the Ecumenical Patriarchate", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1959, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 79.

⁶³ Cf. Visser 't HOOFT, "The Basis: Its History and Significance", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1985, vol. 37, no. 2, p. 171.

the impact of these texts on all of the ecumenical partners and on the international debate. They are essential for the evolution of the theme in the world and they signal future possibilities of *koinonia* ecclesiology.

1. *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*

Before the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Canberra in 1991, inter-church relations showed at the same time a growing polarization and an extraordinary interest in ecclesiology. On the one hand, the fact that the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements spread even more from 1960 onwards led to new confessional resistances. The Reformation churches started to identify themselves more frequently with a traditional form of Christianity, which contrasted with the evangelical churches. Diversity came to be a reason for divergence and schisms. On the other hand, the Orthodox churches had the feeling that they were left outside the ecumenical conversations, because their concerns did not seem to be reflected in the WCC. The Orthodox were tempted to modify their attitude towards multilateral dialogue. The interest in ecumenical consensus waned both in Protestant and Orthodox environments, and the vision for unity was unable to accommodate the multitude of dogmatic hypothesis. The multilateral ecclesiological endeavor was lacking a clear vision of unity and a number of traditions, including the Roman Catholics, preferred to concentrate on bilateral agreements.⁶⁴ In these challenging circumstances, the search for a faithful community brought the ecumenical dialogue to an increasing usage of *koinonia*.

Previous steps in this direction were made by elaborating the documents on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1982, *Church and World* in 1990 and *Confessing the One Faith* in 1991. In fact, the three projects were later correlated to the ecumenical marks of *koinonia*: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was used for demonstrating the sacramental nature of unity; *Church and World* for proving the relational and missionary dimensions of it; and *Confessing the One Faith* for shaping the interdependence between faith's unicity and its plurality. However, affirming that these documents were written envisioning a communion ecclesiology remains questionable. It is highly likely that the persistence of

⁶⁴ Cf. Aram KESHISHIAN, "Towards a Self-Understanding of the WCC", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1991, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 14.

some debates, as in the one on the sacramental nature of unity, were due to the dismissal of ecumenical convergence and chalice fellowship.⁶⁵ It is clear these studies contained in seed the concept of *koinonia*, but in the absence of a document which would have made explicit this theology, their connection with communion may have been missed. They were in line with previous Faith and Order work and they corresponded to the objectives set by the 1920 Encyclical of the Patriarchate. They strived to create unity by promoting a common confession, a common sacramental life and a common witness to the world.

The first synthesis which took, beyond any doubt, the theme of *koinonia* was a statement drafted by Faith and Order for the WCC Seventh Assembly in 1991. The statement, one of several statements on unity adopted by various WCC assemblies, entitled: *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*.⁶⁶ It was requested by the WCC central committee in order to draft the starting points in a renewed multilateral discussion upon Church's unity.

Leaning heavily on *Church and World*, the text opened the reflection on communion by addressing the relation between the Church and the world. The divine goal, it was hinted, is to bring the entire creation under the reign of Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The Church shares in this purpose, being a foretaste and a sign of the Kingdom.⁶⁷ The document understood the Church as an intermezzo between the goal of the world and the fulfilment of this goal; her biggest possibility was to associate herself with the universal mission of the world. By highlighting the missionary specificity of the Church, the study undermined the coherency of what is in its nature the ecclesial communion. When one raises the question on 'what is *koinonia*?' the answers that come back are either a paragraph on what are the requirements for establishing communion, a line about who benefits from communion, or a demonstration of the limits that communion can bear.⁶⁸ As in the

⁶⁵ One of the Reports from Canberra seems to suggest such a conclusion as it speaks about the pains facing disunity in Eucharist. Full communion is linked here with the sacramental reality of the Eucharist. – "Report of the Report Committee", § 10, in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1991, vol. 43, no. 2, p. 265.

⁶⁶ *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*, in Michael KINNAMON (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit. Official Report, WCC Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), p. 172-174. The first draft of this document presented at Canberra was first composed at Etchmiadzin in June 1990. It was completed and revised afterwards at Dublin in the same year. For a comparison cf. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Rome, Italy, 1991*, Faith and Order Paper No. 157 (Geneva: World Council of Churches), 1992, p. 82-87.

⁶⁷ *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling...*, § I.1, p. 172.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, § II.1 and II.2, p. 173.

Lutheran-Catholic agreement from 1984, in *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling* one has the impression that the Body of Christ was seen as an instrument.

At another level, *koinonia* moved in 1991 to a model of reconciled diversity and not to the traditional Faith and Order model of organic unity.⁶⁹ The churches were called to recognize the ecclesial character of one another and not to pass through a *metanoia* in order to reach indivisibility. It was not the struggle for sharing a common service and life, as much as the hope that communion will vouch amidst peoples Church's inclusiveness that motivated the vision from Canberra. The *Statement* appealed for the recognition of Baptism, of apostolic faith and of the ministries, so that efforts for peace and evangelization would gain coherence.⁷⁰ *Koinonia* had the profile of a *co-existence*, without probing the veracity of a *pro-existence*.⁷¹ The Church's communion was built on a tolerance that equated elements from one's tradition with those existing in another tradition. However, this did not make diversity a true feature of unity, because it merely invited churches to tolerate what *appeared* to be dissimilar. It is not solely for a tolerable *co-existence* of differences that communion has relevance, but, especially, because these differences are part of the ecclesial communion itself. *Koinonia* is a *pro-existence*: it projects the Church's being as both diversity, which has to be received by others; and unity, which has to be witnessed by all. Thus, diversity itself calls and recalls communion.

In general, the Assembly subscribed to the text prepared by Faith and Order. In the *Report of Section III*, *koinonia* was restricted to a social sphere and was presented as a way to reconcile and to renew creation.⁷² Communion was understood as an action oriented towards the world and not as a process of ecclesial introspection. It is in connection with this social stress on *koinonia* that church delegates expressed their stand that the unity of

⁶⁹ M. E. CHAPMAN, *Unity as Koinonia: the Ecclesiology of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1993 (dissertation)*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: 1996), p. 401-403. The concept of reconciled diversity comes into play from the Lund Conference in 1952. Then, this notion meant a recognition that Christians share a certain degree of unity. This meant both an opportunity and a challenge for the ecumenical project. Unfortunately, reconciled diversity seems to have lost in the multilateral dialogue the dimension of critical reception and was equalled to the recognition of plurality. If, initially, the concept pushed towards an organic unity, while denying uniformity, today it gives the impression of a dogmatic shallowness.

⁷⁰ *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling...*, § III.2, p. 174.

⁷¹ This terminology was linked with communion by Marlin VANELDEREN, "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1991, vol. 43, no. 1, p. 141.

⁷² Cf. *Report of Section III*, A,1 and B – in M. KINNAMON (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 97 and 100.

the Church should be defined in coordination with the beliefs of other faiths, cultures and languages.⁷³

2. *Koinonia* in the Fifth Faith and Order World Conference, 1993

The declaration on unity was adopted by the Assembly “in silence”, yet the ecclesiological debate caused conflicting reactions.⁷⁴ Appealing for a Faith and Order World Conference which would articulate a convergent theology upon what *is* the Church, became a matter of stringency.⁷⁵ Faith and Order needed a new and enlivening voice. The Fifth Faith and Order World Conference was scheduled for the year 1993 in Santiago de Compostela. In the process of preparing this event, two tendencies regarding *koinonia* came to play a role. First, the institutional aspect of communion became less important and the relational aspect emerged as essential. This led to a depreciation of the study *Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, which, despite being incorporated in the document from Compostela, remained a marginal reference in the multilateral dialogue. The Creed fell under the category of static, organizational, expression of the Church. Secondly, communion started to highlight the spiritual and experiential side of ecclesial unity.⁷⁶ This enriched considerably the debate, yet it also opened the way for dogmatic ambiguities.

In order to ease the proceedings of the conference, the Faith and Order Commission prepared a discussion paper entitled *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*.⁷⁷ Although the document was produced in order to introduce communion ecclesiology to the table, due to shortness of time the text became a summary of the achievements from Compostela. *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness* was divided into four chapters, which displayed the relation between communion and (1) ecclesiology, (2) faith, (3)

⁷³ *Ibid*, B,1 and E,1, p. 100 and 109.

⁷⁴ Jean Marie Roger TILLARD, *Faith and Order after Canberra*, in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Rome, Italy, 1991*, Faith and Order Paper No. 157 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992), p. 17.

⁷⁵ Cf. Mary TANNER, *The Purpose and Goal of the World Conference*, in *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Dublin, Ireland, 1992*, Faith and Order Paper No. 158 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992), p. 17. Cf. also *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Rome, Italy, 1991* ..., p. 13-16.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Stuttgart, Germany, 1993*, Faith and Order Paper No. 165 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), p. 5-6.

⁷⁷ *Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993, Message, Section Reports, Discussion Paper*, Faith and Order Paper No. 164 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993).

service, and finally (4) mission. Three things should be noticed about this document and the way it used *koinonia*.

First of all, the *Discussion Paper* tried to subordinate the Church's unity to the historical contexts of the world, being unable to overcome the duality (as evident in previous documents) between the sociological and the mystical features of *koinonia*. The distance betwixt social communion and eschatological communion was not extensively addressed. From the first lines, communion was described in an ethical light, translating the dogmatic debate onto a moral ground.⁷⁸ It may be that this shift gave the multilateral dialogue a sense of urgency, but it also gave room to a positive appreciation of divisions. Thus if the moral purity, and not the healing presence of Christ, determines communion, then each exclusion made in the name of virtue is just.⁷⁹ This logic made the truth incidental to ethics. Surely, the moral codes are relevant for the unity of the Church, not because they found communion, but because they unfold in the world *koinonia*'s inner strength. The fourth chapter of the *Paper* and the *Report of Section IV* were highlighting exactly the contrary. They were envisioning communion in light of ethical and moral actions.⁸⁰

In the second place, the document established Baptism as a basis to *koinonia*, without developing seriously the relation between communion and Eucharist.⁸¹ Sacramental unity was equalled to God's *oikonomia* in Jesus Christ, but the connection between the structures and the sacraments of the Church were only faintly mentioned. In this respect, the text named a series of ecclesiological problems for which it did not proposed solutions.

The third point that must be noted is the lack of a precise ecclesiological model. The commission defined Christian unity as *koinonia* that is both a gift and calling; but did not debate how communion *looks* like.⁸² In itself, such a refusal was ambivalent. From a standpoint, it brought flexibility to the notion and helped in spreading communion

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, § 1-5, p. 7-8.

⁷⁹ Unlike the agreement from 1993: *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the *Discussion paper* could give one the impression that it founds *koinonia* in ethics and not that it describes the way in which communities in communion should act.

⁸⁰ Cf. M. E. CHAPMAN, *Unity as Koinonia: the Ecclesiology of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1993* (dissertation), vol. 2..., p. 526-534.

⁸¹ *Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993, Message, Section Reports, Discussion Paper...*, § 31, 65-66, p. 19, 29.

⁸² *Ibid*, § 114, p. 44.

ecclesiology, which could have been accommodated by most models of unity. Seen from a different angle, it prevented the emergence of an ecumenical consensus and of a common vision towards unity.

At Santiago de Compostela, the project composed by Faith and Order was analysed by four sub-commissions and came to few original conclusions. The recommendations of the conference (including the launching of a hermeneutical study), mobilized Faith and Order to a close cooperation with all of WCC's programmes and units. The resolutions proved, in the same time, that the ecumenical paradigm has changed. Communion ecclesiology was adopted by Faith and Order, without being anchored into a specific vision of unity. By doing so, the multilateral dialogue lost its applicability, the very thing that had strengthened its outcomes in 1961 at New Delhi. 'What comes next?' became a rhetorical interrogation. There were, however, practical suggestions that pointed to *koinonia*'s conciliar configuration and to mutual accountability of the communities.⁸³ Vague, the concept was taken by all of the following documents to underline, when the discussion met a dead end, that Christians live already a sort of mysterious bound.

3. *Koinonia* in the Convergence Document: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, 2012

A comprehensive and systematic study on ecclesiology was planned by Faith and Order even before Canberra. At a meeting in Budapest in 1989, *The Nature and Mission of the Church – Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology* named this desire and projected *koinonia* as the leading concept for this endeavour. Theologians highlighted seven principles that should guide the study.⁸⁴ Interesting enough is that full communion was not understood as a goal in itself, the final aim was to create a conciliar community in which all Christians can express their faith.⁸⁵ After Santiago, this project became compulsory and in 1998 a first draft of the text was presented at the Assembly at Harare. The answers of the churches led to a new version, received by the 2006 Porto Alegre Assembly. Further responses from the churches and ecumenical partners led to a third version, received by the

⁸³ Cf. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, Cret-Berard, Switzerland, 1994*, Faith and Order Paper No. 167 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), p. 10-13.

⁸⁴ Thomas F. BEST (ed.), *Faith and Order 1985-1989. The Commission Meeting at Budapest 1989*, Faith and Order Paper No. 148 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), p. 203.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 204.

2013 Busan Assembly. In order to have a powerful effect, the 2012 document had to address not only the problems raised by the responses, but a series of other ones. The ecumenical discourse on *koinonia* demanded precise orientation and unifying clarity.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision succeeds in bringing a significant degree of convergence among the members of the Faith and Order Commission. There are passages when the document itself doubts the grounds on which it is building up consensus.⁸⁶ In general, the text corresponds to the ideas from Canberra and Santiago. Thus, the Church's communion, already present among Christians, reflects the life of the Trinity and is grounded in the one Baptism.⁸⁷ Through *koinonia*, the community partakes in God's *oikonomia*, serving in mission⁸⁸ as a royal priesthood (I Peter 2: 9-10) and as an instrument to establish the Kingdom.⁸⁹ Communion justifies diversity, catholicity itself is valued as a quantitative reality, and challenges all churches to recognize in each other the one, true Church of Jesus Christ.⁹⁰ However, in order that diversity will not be divisive, authority and conciliarity safeguard the unity of the Church. Still, hierarchy is secondary to faith and Gospel, because apostolic succession is subordinated to apostolic faith and not correlated to it.⁹¹ The duality between the mystical and the social sides of *koinonia* is not transcended, despite the fact that the document recognizes the eschatological veracity of the Church.⁹² What is surprising is the direction the text seems to take by subverting the tie between *koinonia* and service. The document gives the impression that mission is founding *koinonia*.⁹³ Because of this, some aspects lose their inter-confessional strength. As

⁸⁶ Cf. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), § 32, 45 and 57, p. 18, 26 and 31. Sometimes, this is due to the presentation of different stands on a topic, without a display or a proposition for convergence (§ 32). In other instances, it is due to admitting a general lack of agreement among Christians (§ 57), without hinting a possible solution. All these passages prompted the question upon the aim of a convergence document that was acknowledging the problems and was not presenting the already reached consensus.

⁸⁷ Cf. in comparison *Ibid*, § 21-24, p. 13-14.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, § 1, 3, 13 and 18, p. 5, 6 and 10-11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, § 19, p. 12. Cf. Hanne LAMPARTER, *Reconciling ecclesiologies (dissertation)*, Bossey, 2014, p. 26-27.

⁹⁰ Cf. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision...*, § 6-7, 12, 26, 31 and 9, p. 7, 10, 16, 18 and 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, § 48-55, 22, 29, 38 and 46, p. 27-31, 14, 16, 23 and 26.

⁹² *Ibid*, § 33, p. 21.

⁹³ This seems to be hinted even by the way the document is constructed. The text moves from God's mission, to the unity of the Church in this mission and ends with *The Church: In and for the World*. Mission and service are terms that appear to describe the Church's communion. Referring to the Pentecost, for example, the document states: "3. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the morning of Pentecost for the purpose of equipping them to begin the mission entrusted to them (cf. Acts 2:1-41). God's plan to save the world (sometimes referred to with the Latin expression *missio Dei* or "the mission of God"), is carried out through

praiseworthy the debate on authority may be, for example, it loses its impact when it is rooted in the service of the Church and not into its inner communion. It is true that by doing this, the ministry's authority is safeguarded from human abuses; yet this affects also the relation between the hierarchy and the Church's being. Thus, the hierarchy speaks more about the actions of the Church than about its essence. The document does not find a solution that would bring ecumenical consensus on this matter.

Conclusion

From "The Unity of Church as *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling", 1991, to "The Church: Towards a Common Vision", 2012, the multilateral dialogue has kept along the same lines, alternating only the theological accents. Communion is used to name the already given unity that calls the churches to make visible their invisible bond. This tautological dialectic narrows the ecclesial possibilities of *koinonia*.⁹⁴ If, and the documents seem to go in this direction, one affirms that ecclesial unity is grounded in God's *perichoresis*, then ecclesial communion has a beginning beyond itself. This link with God's communion makes the Church not only a visible affirmation of its own ecclesial invisible unity, but an answer to God's own movement of unity. It is exactly because of this that ecclesial communion should be described, firstly, as a movement that responds to God's own movement of unity. Thus, the Church has to be a constant affirmation of God, an affirmation that develops in perfect symmetry with God's own movement of creation, as a response to God's redemptive love and as a reply to His' sanctifying act. Making visible ecclesial communion the purpose of an already given invisible ecclesial communion, shadows the powerful meaning the concept has. It defines *koinonia* in a framework limited by Church's visibility and its invisibility, instead of shaping the notion in a wider scheme that considers God's

the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church." – *The Church: Towards a Common Vision...*, p. 6 [highlights added]. The document focuses God's *oikonomia* on the plan to save the world and this narrows the dynamic of God's revealing love. One may ask if the Pentecost was solely a empowering of the Apostles for mission or if it was, as well, a breaking in the world of God's communion of love. Is *koinonia* primarily a participation in God's plan to redeem the world or is it a participation in His life giving love? Most of the nuances of the convergence text portray Church's unity as a pilgrimage of God's Peoples, without balancing this image with other biblical metaphors that underline different nuances on what communion means.

⁹⁴ The Anglican-Catholic dialogue from 1990, *Church as Communion*, used also the idea of an invisible communion that leads to visible communion. But it proved better in the nuances of this relation than the convergence multilateral text from 2012.

act and the whole Church (visible and invisible). In this wider framework, *koinonia* should not only lead *to* the Kingdom, but should be seen as a reply that continues even in the everlasting Kingdom of God.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the ethical tendency in discussing Church's unity should be noted. The multilateral conversions were led to this by the constant moral divisions between traditions and inside one church family.⁹⁶ However, until now this ethical approach has proven only to complicate the debate on *koinonia*.

⁹⁵ This should not be understood in terms of the *epektasis*' theory. The idea of movement is used, here, to underline an everlasting dynamic that comes in symmetry with God's own *stasis*.

⁹⁶ John GIBAUT, "Building Up the Body of Christ. Reflection on Ecclesiology and Ethics in the Dialogue of Faith and Order", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 2013, vol. 65, no. 3, p. 388-400.

Chapter III:

***Koinonia* as Relation and Service: The Twofold Meaning of the Term in Bilateral and Multilateral Dialogues**

The historical and theological study of the term *koinonia* in bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues shows that its usage includes two dimensions. It can be affirmed that, when *koinonia* was used, ecclesial unity was defined by (1) Church's relations – with God, with humanity, with the world and with the Kingdom, and through (2) its service – of God, of humanity, of the world and of the Kingdom. These two aspects (relation and service) have progressed well over ecumenical encounters and appeared in the works of great theologians.⁹⁷ While admitting that they do not encompass the whole debate around Church unity, one has to accept that they are essential to modern ecclesiological discussions.

1. *Koinonia* as Relation

In most of the bilateral and multilateral dialogues that use *koinonia*, the Church is described as a sum of relations. Some texts refer to the rapport between Creator and creation, while other documents highlight the communities' interconnection. It is considered that ecclesial cohesion is maintained by the Church's faithfulness to its

⁹⁷ *Koinonia* as relation with God and with the world is developed extensively by John Zizioulas both in connection with personhood and ecclesiology. Cf. John ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, with a foreword by John MEYENDORFF (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 15, 50-52, 58, 63-64, 112-114 etc. More recently he develops this topic in *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, edited by Luke Ben TALLON (London: T&T Clark, 2011), p. 23-24, 35, 64, 124-125, 172-174 etc. This aspect appears as well in the theology of Jean Marie Roger TILLARD, *Church of Churches. The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R. C. De PEAUX (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 29-33. Yet it is linked more with the aspect of *diakonia* that communion must prove. *Koinonia* as service is considered, for example, by Walter KASPER, *That They May All Be One. The Call to Unity Today* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), p. 55-56. For a systematic presentation of both aspects cf. L. F. FUCHS, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology...*, p. 25-43. See, also, G. R. EVANS, *The Church and the Churches. Towards an ecumenical ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 292-295, 304-305.

fundamental relations – with God and with revelation, and by its capability to construct *new relations* in the world – with the modern context, with various faiths and peoples. The dialogues differentiate these levels of relation, but consider ecclesial unity proportional to their sum. For example, even if a community is faithful to God's revelation, it can lose its witnessing purpose if it works against its unity with other local churches or if it considers its own expression and identity as absolute. The hypothesis behind this conception is that the Church is made in the image of the Trinity and, because of that, it exists in a movement that resembles the divine persons' *perichoresis*. The Church is a replica of the Trinitarian love.

Stressing the relational aspect of *koinonia* has both positive and negative effects. By making an analogy between *perichoresis* and ecclesial communion, the dynamics of Church unity gains possibility and perspective. But it carries the risk of neglecting *perichoresis*' ontological reality and the fundamental distinction between creation and God. It is curious that not even one of the many ecumenical texts has considered problematic a purely relational standpoint in describing ecclesial unity. The question '*is unity solely a relation?*' is never raised. Addressing this inquiry could help clarify the difference between God's own communion and ecclesial unity. It would also help in tackling some issues that do not have a transparent ecumenical consensus to this day. Dialogues should try to prove a convergence on what personhood, consciousness and ontology mean,⁹⁸ before developing a communion ecclesiology that depends greatly on these notions.

On the other hand, the belief that ecclesial unity is a *koinonia* of relations leads one to recognize in the Church a *synergy* between God and humanity.⁹⁹ The image of the Pentecost, often taken up by ecumenical conversations, illustrates this well. At Pentecost, the Church becomes visible because the Apostles await the Spirit in a communion and

⁹⁸ Such problems were raised even by members of the Faith and Order commission, but never came to play a true role in the development of communion ecclesiology. Cf. Thomas F. BEST (ed.), *Faith and Order 1985-1989. The Commission Meeting at Budapest 1989*, Faith and Order Paper No. 148 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), p. 206.

⁹⁹ The notion of *synergy* is understood, here, as a dynamic communion with God. Made in the image and likeness of God, with Christ's Incarnation Passions and Resurrection the human nature is raised at its high possibilities. In the Body of Christ, through the Spirit, the faithful lives a relation of obedience to God's will. He is in a permanent answer to God's sanctifying act. The link between *koinonia* and *synergy* was underline, mostly, by the Orthodox Tradition. Cf. Paul M. COLLINS, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), p. 41-42, 49-50, 108, 177-181.

because the Spirit comes down to fulfil their community (Acts 2). Although communion was not connected with *synergy* in the ecumenical documents, it seems to be a logical consequence of the relational dimension that *koinonia* has obtained in these texts. This could be ecumenically very fruitful, if it would maintain the discussion in the paradox that *synergy* implies. Orthodox theology would be valuable for such an attempt, as it highlights the paradox of *synergy* in terms of event and mystery. The unity of the Church is, for the Orthodox, an event because it retrieves perpetually the divine horizon in Christ, and it is a mystery because, through the Holy Spirit, the entire creation becomes One Body.

2. *Koinonia* as Service

A second transversal element of communion ecclesiology in ecumenical dialogue is *diakonia*. On a basic level, this dimension is linked with the former and depends greatly on it. However, the association between *koinonia* and service appears especially in the multilateral dialogue and in the Lutheran-Catholic documents. It is also true that all confessions would recognize that communion and service are inseparable, but the picture they would give to this interpenetration is very different. This becomes evident when the churches shape the rapport between the world and *ekklesia*. While in the West one will hold that the Church is for the world, the East will usually convey that the world is for the Church.¹⁰⁰ This different emphasis affects the way of defining *diakonia* and the Church. Thus, Orthodoxy will focus on the idea that the world must be transformed and brought into a new reality, while other churches will speak of solidarity with the world and of changes that the Church must go through for the world's sake.

This link between communion and service has many ecclesiological ramifications. In itself, *diakonia* is the way the Church makes evident to the world its communion with God. In its ordinations, in its mission, in its confessions, the Church expresses and acts its communion with God. *Leitourghia* cannot be separated from *diakonia*. This should, yet, not be understood as a relation between the nature (*leitourghia*) and the purpose (*diakonia*)

¹⁰⁰ An example for this different starting point is the debate between José Míguez Bonino and John Meyendorff. Cf. Odair Pedrosa MATEUS, "José Míguez Bonino and the Struggle for Global Christian Unity in the 1970s", in Katharina KUNTER and Annegreth SCHILLING (ed.), *Globalisierung der Kirchen: Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen und die Entdeckung der Dritten Welt in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (Göttingen, Niedersachsen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), p. 237-253. Cf. also Philip KARIATIS, *Church as Communion. The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (Sydney: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2010), p. 22-23.

of the Church. In both its nature and work, the Church is liturgical and ministrant. Three things should be noted about this rapport and the way it was addressed in bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

First, the difference between the concepts (1) *that the Church is for the world* and (2) *that the world is for the Church* alters the meaning of Church's *diakonia* and the debate upon how Christians should steward creation. The sense of action, its finality, is not the same in the two presentations. One is more immediate, the other far more ahistorical. While it is true that service should be done for the sake of the world, it must also be held firmly that communion with God is the world's good. If the service of the Church is grounded in the historical development of the world, there is always a risk to forget the liturgical dimension that *diakonia* has. If Church's service is bound by eschatology, there is always a risk to disregard the historical realities that the Church must face. Between the Church and the world there is a relation of inclusion and distinction that remains paradoxical. The Church is for God's creation and the fulfillment of God's creation is the liturgical existence of the Church. Not by chance in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, the Church is depicted as a woman that is old and young in the same time. This image catches the historical development of the Church in the world and the eschatological aspect of the world in the Church.

Second, the rapport between the Church and the world affects the connotation of ecclesial authority. This was highly evident in the multilateral conversation. Thus, if ecclesial order functions as a historical form in the service of the world, hierarchy is contextual and due to be reformed. However, if hierarchy is rooted in the eschatological revelation of the Church, its changeability becomes impossible. Again, underlining one aspect and disregarding the other can be problematic. Ecclesial authority is linked with creation, but it is also dependent on the revelation of God. Authority has to serve communion, as Jesus served the world, in *kenosis*. Yet, the full meaning of authority and its power to bind unity can be recognized from the eschaton. As the light and work of Jesus were understood by His disciples when read through the lenses of His Resurrection, Ascension and through the Pentecost, the role of authority cannot be fully grasped from history alone. In the world, authority is functional and mystical at once.

Third, the correlation between Church and world has an impact upon the ecclesial self-understanding. The historical standpoint tends to describe the Church in sociological terms. Not rarely, in the dialogues, some churches portray *ekklesia* as inclusive or exclusive, as traditional or modern, as capable to undergo changes or incapable to do so. The Orthodox eschatological presentation tends to disregard any social reality of the People of God and sees the Church in an already given glory. Unfortunately, none of the already published agreements proved able to move constructively beyond these contradictions.

It should be underlined that the Bible attests to both a service for *koinonia* and of a *koinonia* for *diakonia*. To move only in one direction means to fall short of the fullness of the ecclesial scripturistic image. Yet, it would be helpful to approach this complementarity first in relation to God. *Diakonia* and *koinonia* should be considered in relation to God, the One who serves creation in unity and unites creation in service. That does not mean that the relation between Church and world would become secondary, but it will be oriented towards God's own actions of creation, sanctification and redemption.

Conclusion

The Church is a paradoxical reality and it can be described in sentences which appear as mutually exclusive. One can affirm that the Church became a Body at the Pentecost, while holding, at the same time, that it was already embodied in Christ. By fire, the Spirit glorified the Church, yet, because of the Word, the Church serves the world when anchored in *kenosis*. Seen through its history, the Church is a movement to answer God's creative act; seen from eschatology, it is a rest and a *stasis*. Against all contexts, the Church remains the Bride of Christ and nothing can vanquish it, but, even in the *eschaton*, it remains the people of God, people who move with an unmoved movement. This dialectic makes ecclesiology a complicated theological field, in which one can easily favour one aspect and overlook the other.

Despite all the differences persisting amidst confessions, when considering the Church's unity, recent ecumenical conversations that appealed to communion ecclesiology show certain commonalities. Especially two transversal elements persist in association with *koinonia*: the relational dimension of unity and the serving purpose of the Church. It is, however, interesting to note that both elements highlight the *kinesis* for unity and not its

stasis. Thus, they are starting points for an ecumenical ecclesiology, but they are yet unable to capture the entire paradox of ecclesial unity.

Conclusion

Both ‘*koinonia*’ and ‘communion’ have been developed in ecumenical dialogue, at times as interchangeable concepts, at other times in divergent yet complementary ways.

Recent bilateral and multilateral dialogues have often appealed to *koinonia* in order to develop an ecumenical ecclesiology. Based on the scriptural meaning of the concept and on the spiritual dimension it gained after 1990s, it came easy for most confessions to link their vision of unity with communion ecclesiology. *Koinonia* became a leading notion and most Christian traditions were able to reach a partial agreement because of it. The ecumenical potential of *koinonia* is, thus, extremely valuable. In contrast, it should also be noted that a historical and theological study of the bilateral and multilateral documents that used communion, shows the persistence of differences in the way churches understand the concept of communion. Sometimes, the different emphasis the churches stressed, lead Christians to divergent visions of unity rather than one.¹⁰¹

Further, it must be recognized that *koinonia*, as with all biblical images of ecclesial unity, remains an analogy and will never be able to fully grasp what *is* the Church. Communion portrays unity in a lively way; it presents a reality that is lived, that has mobility. Thus, the fact that *koinonia* cannot circumscribe ecclesial unity should not be considered problematic. Often, during their dialogues, the churches had to admit that theological agreement is not enough to achieve unity. Churches acknowledged that ecclesial unity is, somehow, a complex living fact that cannot be grasped by a concept; it can only be *imagined*. What is essential, yet, is that communion ecclesiology will be developed in a framework that considers and appeals to all the other biblical and patristic images of unity. These connections would, most probably, push the notion to address

¹⁰¹ One may highlight that this diversity in describing the Church’s unity is a positive thing. The problem of possessing different representations of unity is that, usually, one representation excludes the other, making, thus, impossible a positive relation of the two. The ecumenical movement made many efforts to develop an ecclesiological vision that presented unity models as complementary.

further the relations between: personhood and community; communitarian distinction and universal cohesion; authority, mission and responsibility. This would increase the value and possibilities *koinonia* already has.

It is precisely because of this that *Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* should be reconsidered by ecumenical partners. This study was neglected, as it came shortly after BEM and was succeeded immediately by the ecclesiological work of the Faith and Order Commission. The ecumenical potential of *Confessing the Apostolic Faith* was not explored in depth and its ecclesiological possibilities have not yet been extensively shown. In developing *koinonia* theologians had often referred to Church's catholicity, apostolicity and holiness, even if they did not specifically appeal to *Confessing the Apostolic Faith*. The ecumenical convergence of this text could help in establishing a stronger consensus on the relation between communion, catholicity, faith, apostolic succession and ecclesial holiness. It would associate scriptural and patristic visions of unity with the modern understanding of ecclesial cohesion.

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